

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 8, 2013

Secretary Ken Salazar
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

Recent news reports indicate the Department of Interior's "Idle Iron" policy is killing tens of thousands of pounds of Red Snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. In an undercover video released today from a rig explosion in the Northern Gulf, we finally have visual evidence of the devastation caused by this directive.

In light of this new evidence, we request the Department immediately cease all activities relating to the disposal of abandoned oil and gas rigs and platforms, under "Idle Iron" or other authorities, until a stakeholder process can be developed to determine a set of best practices that address the removal of unused structures in the context of the thriving marine ecosystems associated with them.

Red Snapper are not the only victims of these senseless acts, as oil and gas platforms scattered throughout the Northern Gulf of Mexico provide critical habitat to many different species. As currently constructed and implemented, Interior's policy stands to inflict sweeping, irreversible damage. Extensive evidence indicates these structures form the basis for thriving ecosystems that sustain an immense diversity of life including reef fish, turtles, marine mammals, corals and seabirds.

Rebuilding and management plans for Gulf reef fish, important resources for recreational anglers and commercial fishermen, are predicated on the presence of this artificial habitat. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the body charged with managing marine resources in federal waters of the Gulf, is currently in the process of declaring rigs and related structures as Essential Fish Habitat. At the same time, your Department is destroying this habitat and killing tens of thousands of pounds of one of the most important fish species in the Gulf of Mexico.

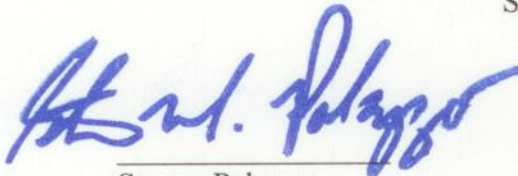
On top of that, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is working to further restrict access to this resource -- proposing to reduce the Red Snapper season from 46 days down to 27. Based on independent data and anecdotal evidence from those who make their living on the water, we know snapper stocks in the Gulf of Mexico have made significant progress in their recovery. Still, the NMFS maintains their position that this fishery is over-fished and in danger of further degradation unless draconian restrictions are implemented.

At the same time one federal agency is restricting fishing for the preeminent target fish species in the Gulf, another – yours – is literally killing thousands of pounds of fish and destroying the habitat on which they rely. Certainly, Mr. Secretary, you see the hypocrisy here. These fish are the economic life-blood for thousands of our constituents along the Gulf of Mexico, and this insanity must stop – immediately.

We acknowledge the complex elements involved in developing a comprehensive policy to deal with “Idle Iron,” and we recognize that some structures may have associated environmental hazards that should be removed and remediated as soon as possible. That said, the fact that these structures provide critical habitat and ecological benefits that far outweigh the benefits of removal should compel us to engage stakeholders and develop rational criteria to protect them wherever possible.

Mr. Secretary, for these reasons, and in the strongest possible terms, we request an immediate cessation to any planned removals in the Gulf of Mexico under the auspices of “Idle Iron.” We appreciate your attention and look forward to your quick response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steven Palazzo".

Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jo Bonner".

Jo Bonner
Member of Congress